

QQQ Meg Eden Kuyatt

[00:00:00] **Meg:** And I think I'm learning the longer I'm in the process, it's nice cuz you can look back and I see nothing's a waste.

[00:00:10] **Sarah:** Welcome to Queries Qualms and Quirks, the weekly podcast that asks published authors to share their successful query letter and discuss their journey from First Spark to day of publication. I am your host, author Sarah Nicolas and literary agent Sarah N. Fisk.

Meg Eden Kuyatt is a 2020 pitch wars mentee and teaches creative writing at colleges and writing centers.

She is the author of the 2021 Towson Prize for literature winning Poetry Collection, *Drowning in the Floating World*, released by Press 53 in 2020, And children's novels. Most recently, *GOOD DIFFERENT*, A j LG Gold Standard Selection coming from Scholastic in 2023. So please welcome Meg to the show.

Hello.

[00:00:53] **Meg:** Hey.

[00:00:54] **Sarah:** So we're gonna be talking about your journey to publication today, and we're gonna start all the way back at the beginning. When did you first start getting interested in writing, and then how long did it take from then before you started getting serious about pursuing publication?

[00:01:09] **Meg:** So it was pretty fast between the two things. I think in middle school I started enjoying writing. In high school. Entering high school, I became serious about writing and I started querying. in high school, I got my first agent as like a junior in high school. Um, so I decided when I wanted to do something, I was gonna like, go in or like go hole.

[00:01:30] **Sarah:** All right, so how did you learn more about the publishing industry, like how it works, how to go about it, how to write a query, all those different things?

[00:01:40] **Meg:** So, um, just a lot of research on my own. back in the olden days it was going to the library and getting one of those big, um, Guides to, queries and guides to the, the market guides. I can't remember exactly what

they're called. and I'd just go through and look and you had such little information compared to now.

It was like what they represented and their name and maybe a website. Uh, there was still a lot of mail-in stuff. It's wild. So I'd be like, ah, they do ya. Great. Um, but now we, there's so much, More you can find. And I've more recently, finding my newest agent, you know, would be looking at things like manuscript academy, manuscript wishlist, you know, podcasts like yours and your YouTube, uh, channel and stuff like that.

All the interviews. Um, so you can get a lot more of information of what might be a fit instead of just what are the categories. this is like dating in the sense that there's gotta be this weirdly subjective match of clicking on multiple levels instead of just Ah, they do ya. I do ya. It'll be a perfect fit.

[00:02:39] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm. Yeah, we definitely had way less information back then. Although writing blogs and agents doing Ask Agent on Twitter, that was like a huge change.

[00:02:51] **Meg:** Absolutely.

[00:02:52] **Sarah:** So then what happened? Can you break down for us your journey, even though I know it's quite winding from then to signing your first book contract?

[00:03:02] **Meg:** sure. So I'll give you, I'll try and give a truncated version, but please feel free to let me know if you want me to go into more detail. because yes, it was very long and winding. So, like I said, I started in high school, um, and things went well in high school. You know, I wrote a book, I sent it out. I got an acceptance pretty quickly, and I went, oh, you know, this will be my career.

I don't have to go to college. I'm just gonna sell books and be famous. You know, all these unrealistic pipe dreams. Um, that obviously didn't happen. Um, I had a really good first agent. it was just so generous for her to sign me in the first place. I did not know what I was doing. And she really helped me with editing.

We sent off, we almost got a yes. Um, an editor really loved it, but she couldn't convince the house. And after that point, I think I felt, less engagement from, from my agent. I was like, oh, here's these other books and here's this other

stuff. Um, but I think she was. Becoming bigger and having more clients and, we were kind of drifting apart.

Um, and at that time I was in college, and I started, you know, writing other things. sending wherever I could cuz, I felt like my agent wasn't doing stuff. and I wanna be clear, I don't necessarily recommend that path. Um, that's what me as a college student thought was a good decision. Um, and it, you know, it had, um, its ups and downs, but I guess, um, I was in college, I was in grad school for writing.

Um, and at some point a small press wanted one of my books. and so I decided to do that on my own. cuz I guess I was feeling jaded by agents at that point of like, oh, I'm doing all this work and my agent's doing nothing. Um, so I, you know, uh, which is not so true, it's just how I felt. so I signed with, a small press and I had my first YA come out in 2017.

And there were great things about that. My book was super weird. I think I kind of came to the conclusion only a small press would want this. and I wanted it out in the world. and I had a really great collaborative process with that small press. You know, when, when small press, it's an, it is truly a labor of love and, I had a really positive relationship with my editor, and so that was really nice. but I wanted to see what was possible. Um, I started questioning maybe if I, if, if that was the best thing for me to do, or just to kind of see what could I get with an agent, especially being in a debut group and seeing my friends be like, my book's in an airport.

My book's in New York Times bestseller and I'm like, oh, I kind of do want those things. I think I, you know, went back to the query trenches. Um, and I had lots of ups and downs there. I got lots of offers, on and off, but, um, many of those I realized were not a good fit. I was kind of realizing from my first experience a little bit more of what I wanted and just that getting an offer isn't necessarily mean I should go with that agent.

And I did sign with an agent. and that agent and I worked for a year on edits. and we separated over creative differences. Um, and that was like my lowest of low. I loved this agent. I really respected her opinions. She was being so hard on my work, it felt like another M f A, but it, and I felt. I don't know. I felt so confused by the experience because I thought, like I was trying to do what she was saying, um, shouldn't that be working? Um, and I just felt like, what am I doing here? I've been working on this process of getting a book out, and being a writer for so long and one of my writer friends said, this is when everyone else would quit.

when it gets hard like this, this is when people tend to quit, but you could keep going. Um, and that was really an encouragement to me. This journey is hard. Um, and even now on this end, you know, it's still hard today I woke up kind of being like, why am I doing this? You know, there's, there's frustrating things in the process no matter what, but, that encouraged me to keep going.

I worked on a new project later, worked on yet another project, um, a middle grade. and that got accepted to Pitch Wars. I sent that, on a whim to pitch Wars thinking, eh, why not? and then that was a huge turning point. I found a mentor that really got my work. Um, it got great attention in the showcase.

That does not always happen in those kind of things. so I'm really grateful for that. Um, and I signed with my current agent, from that and, uh, she's amazing. and I really love working with her. And she sold GOOD DIFFERENT.

[00:06:52] **Sarah:** And you also have some poetry collections published. At what point did those happen?

[00:06:57] **Meg:** So poetry, was mostly in grad school, so I did my MFA in poetry. and I think that was kind of what was taking most of my real estate mentally. Novels kinda I took a break a little bit in that point. so I did a lot of chap books during that time and my first full length collection came out in 2020.

Um, and so I still write those. and I love, you know, the one that's coming out, GOOD DIFFERENT is a novel in verse. So I'm able to combine both those loves. And so I think now I'm kind of trying to see how I can put the two together.

[00:07:24] **Sarah:** I do love when poets write prose though, because they have such a master of like word choice and rhythm that I just love it when a, poet writes prose.

[00:07:35] **Meg:** Yeah. Works different muscles.

[00:07:37] **Sarah:** Yeah.

[00:07:37] **Meg:** kind. Cool. See how that, um, impacts the work.

[00:07:40] **Sarah:** It's time for the first Q of the podcast. Can you read your successful query letter for us?

[00:07:46] **Meg:** Sure thing. So, uh, this is with a different title and some things have changed, but. Selah's Guide to Normal 22,000 words is an own voices, middle grade novel in verse following Selah a 12 year old autistic girl with sensory hypersensitivity who must advocate for herself through her newfound love of poetry or risk expulsion from the school she loves.

Fans of Ellie Terry, and Laura Shovan will resonate with Selah's journey, which is largely inspired by my own experiences on the autism spectrum with sensory issues and social anxiety. On the surface, seventh grader Selah Godfrey, seems like a neurotypical girl. Quiet, studious, and polite. But what others don't know is that for Selah every loud voice, and unwelcome touch, start a battle inside her because of her sensory processing issues. While Selah imagines being powerful, like the dragons, she loves the constant sensory stimuli in her environment, leave her feeling exhausted. To survive, she's created a series of rules for how to be a normal person out in public. Don't speak out, don't be weird. Keep your feelings inside, but keeping up with her impossible standards are getting harder and harder.

When a series of stressors bring Selah to her limit, she breaks down by hitting a classmate who has continuously invaded her personal space. This blows Selah's normal cover as people, even her once friends, label her as weird, unpredictable, and dangerous. With the help of her grandfather and English teacher, Selah discovers poetry and begins to process and cope with the world around her. As parents and administrators escalate their concerns over Selah's presence at the school, Selah must break past her, invented rules and fears to share her inmost thoughts with the neurotypical world around her, even if it means being forever marked as weird.

I am a 2020 Pitch Wars mentee and worked with mentor Eric Bell on this manuscript. Through dv pit, Editor, Sam Gentry, Rosie Ahmed, and Megan Ilintzki of expressed interest in Seeing Selah's Guide to Normal once I have representation. I teach creative writing at the university level and hold an MFA in poetry from the University of Maryland, College Park. I am the author of the Young Adult Novel Post High School Reality Quest and the Poetry Collection, drowning in the Floating World. And I am the webinar coordinator for my S C B W I region. The completed manuscript is available upon request. I also have a completed young adult manuscript available for consideration.

I look forward to speaking with you in the future.

[00:10:21] **Sarah:** All right. Thank you for sharing. you've talked about it a little bit, but How has your experience been since signing your various

contracts? Especially let us know what surprises you encountered along the way.

[00:10:32] **Meg:** I think all the waiting, everyone says, you know, publishing's slow and I was like, yeah, yeah, yeah. But once you get your foot in the door, you know you've got your option contract and it says you'll get, have 30 days and you'll hear back. Not necessarily true. announcing takes forever. actually starting promo feels to me like it takes forever.

so there's just so much waiting, even when you're, things are moving relatively fast. Uh, so I think that that's been the biggest shock and it continues to shock me. Like I'm still shocked, so I'm still learning.

[00:11:04] **Sarah:** Yes, I agree. So it is time for our quick round. I call it author dna.

Are you a pantsier or a plotter?

[00:11:14] **Meg:** A pantsier.

[00:11:15] **Sarah:** I see your, little corkboard with all the little notes behind you. I thought you were gonna say planner.

[00:11:21] **Meg:** I'm becoming more of a planner, but I have pantsier dna, so kind of finding the middle road

[00:11:27] **Sarah:** Are you an over writer or an underwriter?

[00:11:30] **Meg:** overwriter

[00:11:31] **Sarah:** Do you prefer to write in the morning or at night?

[00:11:33] **Meg:** usually morning.

[00:11:35] **Sarah:** When starting a new project, do you typically start with character or plot or concept or something else first?

[00:11:41] **Meg:** Character

[00:11:42] **Sarah:** Do you prefer coffee or tea?

[00:11:44] **Meg:** tea

[00:11:45] **Sarah:** When you're writing, do you prefer silence or some kind of sound

[00:11:49] **Meg:** Music.

[00:11:50] **Sarah:** when it comes to the first draft?

Are you more of a get it down kind of person or a get it right kind of person?

[00:11:55] **Meg:** Closer to get it down, but kind of somewhere in between.

[00:11:58] **Sarah:** What tools or software do you use to draft?

[00:12:01] **Meg:** Scrivener

[00:12:03] **Sarah:** Do you prefer drafting or revising more?

[00:12:06] **Meg:** revising,

[00:12:07] **Sarah:** Do you write in sequential order or do you hop around?

[00:12:10] **Meg:** hop around, hence Scrivener.

[00:12:12] **Sarah:** and final quick round question, are you an extrovert or an introvert?

[00:12:16] **Meg:** More introvert.

[00:12:17] **Sarah:** Now it's time for the second Q of the podcast. What were some of the qualms or worries that you had on your journey and were they realized or did you overcome them or how did they shake out?

[00:12:27] **Meg:** I wanna answer this multiple ways. I'm trying to figure out the right way to answer it. I think there's a continuous qualm of can I do this thing as a career? and I'm trying to learn to reconcile with the fact that I can't control 99% of this career. But I think during the process a lot of the qualm is, will this book, is this a waste of time?

Will this book just never see the light of day? And I think I'm learning the longer I'm in the process, it's nice cuz you can look back and I see nothing's a waste. I was just looking back at old notes for Selah and be like, oh right, I thought there were all these possible directions. Um, but now I know the right direction.

And now maybe I could take some of those other ideas for something else. I think it's beautiful and that it's, it's a constant process where you can keep grabbing things so you don't have to ever feel like this is a waste. everything you write is, towards the next thing.

[00:13:14] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm. All right, and now for the third Q do you have any writing quirks? Is there anything about your writing process that you feel is like different or interesting or unique?

[00:13:22] **Meg:** probably nothing is terribly unique. All the things I think are unique are probably relatively normal. yeah, I, I hop all over the place. I'm a poet, so I think in moments, this is not sponsored by a Scrivener, but I love Scrivener now, uh, because you can have all these little documents and you can kind of flip back and forth.

Like, I'm working on a new novel in verse right now. And so I'm kind of like, ah, this will probably happen, that the all is lost, and I can drag that into the All Is Lost folder. And this will probably happen around the midpoint. And you know, like, I can Hop back and forth. Um, and I used to spend so much time scrolling up and down in Word and getting so confused.

So yeah, I definitely am a hopper in, think in little moments.

[00:14:03] **Sarah:** mm. I do think most people answer that quick round question that they write in sequential orders. So I think hopping around is a little more rare

[00:14:12] **Meg:** oh, wow. Okay.

[00:14:13] **Sarah:** When you were in the lowest parts of your journey, what kept you going and why did you stick to it?

[00:14:18] **Meg:** I think the writing always keeps me going because I could say I'm never gonna write again. This industry's terrible and so depressing and all that stuff. But I love, I can't not write. Like that's how I think, that's how I

process, that's how I express joy, express pain. Like it's how I get through things.

Like right now I'm just trying to process some things that happened this year and writing is how I do it. so like just the very act I. I don't think I can stop myself. So, and, and I think the other thing that gets me through again is looking backwards, seeing how I've hit these things before.

Nothing's new under the sun. and I've survived, you know, as a human being. I've survived. Um, and I've gotten to see exciting things like, I have had books come out, and the books are coming out, and I think that timeline, that progression is, comforting.

[00:15:11] **Sarah:** Yeah, I just ran into someone I hadn't seen in a while in writing industry, and they were like, oh, how are you doing? And I was like, thriving. And he was like, really? And I was like, oh, I meant surviving. I meant surviving.

[00:15:25] **Meg:** So true.

[00:15:26] **Sarah:** yeah. Do you feel like you made any mistakes along the way that you might want to warn listeners about? So maybe they don't make the same ones?

[00:15:34] **Meg:** I don't know how to feel about my first small press book. I don't know if that was necessarily a mistake, but I, I think maybe my attitude in some ways wasn't the best. So I do want to encourage, listeners, Representation with an agent, is a good, important protection. If nothing else, like my, my thing worked out fine.

but an agent, even if it's a small press that you decide you wanna work with, having somebody at your, like looking at the contract protecting you is a good thing. Um, so I think when I was in the past like, oh, I don't need an agent, I think that that was not correct. so I think I would warn people of that.

[00:16:12] **Sarah:** Kind of a similar question. Can you share with listeners one of the most important lessons that you learned on your journey to publication?

[00:16:19] **Meg:** there's a few. I think persistence is always one that you just gotta keep doing this thing. so my mom, This is like a weird parable, but it's related. My mom, she bought wisteria, and for seven years it didn't bloom. And

she went, ah, this isn't working. And ripped it out. It takes eight years for wisteria to

[00:16:35] **Sarah:** Oh, no.

[00:16:35] **Meg:** had waited one stinking year, she'd have wisteria. Um, and I think writings like that. You can give it like your timeline of like, I'll do this for five years or whatever, um, and then rip it out and it might've just needed a sixth year. you just, you don't know, um, and you don't know which book it is. Uh, Good Different's.

Like my 17th book or something. So 17th time's the try. Uh, so like you just, you don't know. Oh, see, persistence is important. Something I'm learning right now because this is a constant journey. I don't think, just cuz like I have a book coming out means the journey's over is that holding these projects loosely like y It's weird because you have to love them so fiercely to write them and to argue for them, to your agent, to your editor and all that.

But also you have to hold them loosely because you don't know what'll happen. Um, I have something. sent out as option material right now. And I have like, I love the idea so much and I so badly want them to say yes, but they may say no. And it may be for something completely outta my control. It might be like, we have too many books on generational trauma right now.

Um, you know, or whatever. Um, maybe like the reasons are so outta your control. So I have to like kind of hold that loosely and be prepared to be able to send like, okay, well here's another option. So you're having this weird, simultaneously holding tight, holding loosely. Um, and ha be the flexibility of being willing to try a new idea.

and I think that I'm still learning that one, and I think that one's really hard, but I think that that will aid you to succeed in the industry. Cause if you're trying to hold onto one book, like, this is my one book and it's gotta get out there, you're probably not gonna grow as a writer. I know when I did that, I did not grow as much and you're probably not gonna see much success because you need that flexibility

[00:18:12] **Sarah:** yeah, I think one of the things that surprises people when they start listening to this podcast or when I talk at conferences is most writers don't get published on their first book or even often their second or third book. and so you definitely have more books in you and, uh, sometimes you have to let a book go, and that doesn't mean you can't come back to it.

And if you wanna know more about that, listen to Mike Chen's episode because he talks about that a lot.

this is not a business that most of us succeed in completely on our own.

So who are some of the people who helped you along the way and.

[00:18:44] **Meg:** So many answers to that. well, to my eighth grade history teacher who said I was a good writer, I think that was a big catalyst. I think ev behind every writer is a teacher that said, you're a good writer. my mom, My mom has always been an encourager of my writing. she has funded my writing, um, since a young age.

I wanted to submit to contests and stuff, and she said, well, those submission fees are part of your education. Um, and she couldn't have been more right. Um, and she surrounded me with books. Our whole house is like built of books. so huge props to her. and probably the biggest is my husband, um, who has constantly.

seen my writing as important, and encouraged me to leave my full-time job to take a GAsip to teach and focus on my degree instead of making money. Who, even now today, you know, we're having a conversation, I'm like, oh gosh, is this writing thing really gonna happen? Like, am I gonna make enough money to pay the bills?

Do I need to go back to work? And he's like I don't think you should quit writing. Like I never think that. and it has been obviously years and years of that encouragement. So, behind every good writer is a patron that, you know, can help make that possible. Um, there's a great privilege to being able to dedicate this time, so I'm so grateful that he's carved that space and allowed me to make that a focus.

[00:19:57] **Sarah:** Hmm. All right. So we heard a little bit about Good different, but is there anything you wanna tell listeners about it before we go?

[00:20:04] **Meg:** so it should be coming out spring 2023 with Scholastic. It's a novel in verse about an autistic girl that, wishes she was a dragon, but learns that poetry is powerful. and so I, I'm really excited about it coming out. I'm really excited by everyone's encouragement that's, You know, online expressed excitement for it.

and I hope you'll check it out.

[00:20:23] **Sarah:** Awesome. All right. Thank you Mag so much for coming on the show today and sharing your story with my listeners.

[00:20:30] **Meg:** Awesome. Thank you so much for having me. It's such an honor.

[00:20:33] **Sarah:** Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Queries Qualms and Quirks. You can find the text of Meg's query in the show notes along with links to find out more about her and her books. If you enjoyed the show, I'd appreciate if you help me find new listeners by leaving a review on Apple Podcast or podchaser, telling your friends or sharing this episode on social media.

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Thank you so much for listening, and we'll see you next.